

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Original) A method of forming a shelf-stable encapsulated salt for incorporation into a ground meat food product, the method comprising:

(a) heating a mixture of a reducing sugar, an amino acid, water and an edible oil to produce a Maillard reaction and form a Maillard mixture; and

(b) encapsulating a salt particle with the Maillard mixture.

2. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising at least partially controlling the heating of the mixture by an initial amount of water mixed with the reducing sugar, the amino acid and the edible oil.

3. (Original) The method of Claim 2, further comprising heating the Maillard mixture to remove at least 95% of the water.

4. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising cooling the Maillard mixture prior to encapsulating the salt.

5. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising incorporating the encapsulated salt into a ground meat product.

6. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising adding an oil preservative after forming the Maillard mixture and before encapsulating the salt.

7. (Original) A method of forming a shelf-stable encapsulated salt, the method comprising:

(a) forming a mixture of a reducing sugar and one of an amino acid and protein in water;

(b) adding the reducing sugar, the one of the amino acid and protein and the water to an edible oil to form an unreacted mixture;

(c) heating the unreacted mixture for a time sufficient to produce a Maillard reaction and remove at least 95% of the moisture to form a Maillard mixture; and

(d) encapsulating a plurality of salt particles with the Maillard mixture.

8. (Original) The method of Claim 7, further comprising removing at least 99% of the water from the Maillard mixture.

9. (Original) The method of Claim 7, further comprising adding a preservative after formation of the Maillard mixture and prior to encapsulating the plurality of salt particles.

10. (Original) The method of Claim 7, further comprising at least partially controlling the heating of the unreacted mixture by controlling the amount of water in the unreacted mixture.

11. (Original) A food additive, comprising:

(a) a salt particle; and

(b) an encapsulating oil on the salt particle, the encapsulating oil including a Maillard reaction product.

12. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the encapsulating oil has less than 5% water by weight.

13. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the encapsulating oil has less than 1% water by weight.

14. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the salt particle is sodium chloride.

15. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the encapsulating oil includes a preservative.

16. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the encapsulating oil includes sufficient preservative to be shelf stable.

17. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the Maillard reaction is formed from an amino acid and a reducing sugar.

18. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the Maillard reaction is formed from a protein and a reducing sugar.

19. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the Maillard reaction is formed from at least one of threonine, methionine and serine.

20. (Original) The food additive of Claim 11, wherein the Maillard product is formed from xylose and an amino acid.

21. (Withdrawn) A food product comprising:

(a) ground meat; and

(b) a plurality of encapsulated salt particles throughout the ground meat, the encapsulated salt particles including an encapsulating oil having a Maillard reaction product.